LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 014 741 2

F 116
.N68
1896
Copy 1

AND THE TRANSMISSION OF ENGLISH POWER IN NORTH AMERICA.

An Address

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ON ITS

NINETY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY,

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1896,

BY

JUSTIN WINSOR, LL.D.

NEW YORK:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.

1896.

CABOT AND THE TRANSMISSION OF ENGLISH POWER IN NORTH AMERICA.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ON ITS

NINETY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY,

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1896,

BY

JUSTIN WINSOR, LL.D.

NEW YORK:
PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.
1896.

LIBRARY
MAP
CB
1897
DEPT OF STATE

F116
.N5
1896

Officers of the Society, 1896.

PRESIDENT,

JOHN ALSOP KING.

FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT,

J. PIERPONT MORGAN.

SECOND VICE-PRESIDENT,

JOHN S. KENNEDY.

FOREIGN CORRESPONDING SECRETARY,

REV. EUGENE A. HOFFMAN, D.D.

DOMESTIC CORRESPONDING SECRETARY,

EDWARD F. DE LANCEY.

RECORDING SECRETARY,

ANDREW WARNER.

TREASURER,

ROBERT SCHELL.

LIBRARIAN,

WILLIAM KELBY.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

FIRST CLASS—FOR ONE YEAR, ENDING 1897.

JOHN A. WEEKES, J. PIERPONT MORGAN.

SECOND CLASS—FOR TWO YEARS, ENDING 1898.

EDWARD F. DE LANCEY, DANIEL PARISH, JR.,
FRANCIS TOMES.

THIRD CLASS—FOR THREE YEARS, ENDING 1899.

FREDERIC GALLATIN, ISAAC J. GREENWOOD,
CHARLES HOWLAND RUSSELL.

FOURTH CLASS—FOR FOUR YEARS, ENDING 1900.

JOHN S. KENNEDY, GEORGE W. VANDERBILT,
CHARLES ISHAM.

EDWARD F. DE LANCEY, *Chairman*,
DANIEL PARISH, JR., *Secretary*.

[The President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and Librarian are members, *ex-officio*, of the Executive Committee.]

PROCEEDINGS.

At a meeting of the New York Historical Society, held in its Hall, on Wednesday evening, November 18, 1896, to celebrate the Ninety-second Anniversary of the Founding of the Society:

The proceedings were opened with prayer by the Very Reverend Eugene A. Hoffman, D.D., Dean of the General Theological Seminary.

The President made some remarks on the history, progress, and wants of the Society.

The Anniversary Address was then delivered by Justin Winsor, LL.D., of Harvard University, on "Cabot and the Transmission of English Power in North America."

On its conclusion, the Rev. B. F. De Costa, D.D., with remarks, submitted the following resolution which was adopted unanimously:

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society be presented to Justin Winsor, LL.D., for the eloquent and learned address which he has delivered this evening, and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication.

A benediction was then pronounced by Dean Hoffman.

The Society then adjourned.

Extract from the Minutes:

Andrew Warner,
Recording Secretary.

CABOT AND THE TRANSMISSION OF ENGLISH POWER IN NORTH AMERICA.

Go back, if you please, to a tropical night in October a little over four hundred years ago. The Great Discoverer stands on his deck, and the goal he was seeking is before him. A rising moon at his back lies glimmering on a sandy shore in front. Perhaps what he saw was the Asiatic main. Perhaps it was one of the thousands of islands which Marco Polo had told the European world lay off that shore of the Orient which looked toward the rising sun.

From the time when, upon the return of Columbus, Peter Martyr questioned if the Asiatic coast had really been touched, down to the failure of the Admiral on his fourth voyage to find a passage through the land of Veragua, the cunning cosmographers of Europe had played fast and loose with the notions that what had been found was really a New World, or the Old World approached in a new way. On his second voyage, Columbus, loath to recognize what others saw, found more than half of his companions better informed than him-

self. The Asiatic main had not, as he claimed, been found in the insular Cuba. It has recently been proved, where earlier it was a necessary deduction, that Columbus, on his last voyage, or to be more precise, that his brother Bartholomew, as is shown in a remarkable map which Professor Wieser has reproduced, was convinced that a stretch of ocean lay beyond the Isthmus, where Balboa later saw it. The way was thus made clear in 1505 either to reach the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, or to round the Cape of Good Hope, on the track to western Europe, if only a strait be found in the tropics, as Magellan nearly a score of years later was to find one at the south.

While this development was going on in the belt of the Antilles, a new experience was bringing into correlation with the solution in the south the geographical mystery of the north. This new disclosure was the fruition, under the new passion, of numerous ventures, which the hardy west-country English seamen had made to discover and sail beyond the long-sought island of Brésil. So it was that not long after daybreak, on a summer's day, in a northern latitude, in 1497, less than a score of daring adventurers, on board a little ship called the Matthew, a mere cock-boat in our modern eyes (which for some weeks had been buffeting the sea, with an average speed of forty or fifty miles a day), espied a land which in its transient summer verdure appeared more pleasing than it

really was. They supposed it to be the Asiatic coast in a high latitude.

It did not matter to that scant company, and it does not matter to us, whether the shore seen in that crisp morning hour was the shore of some coast-island or the mainland. In conducting an expedition, as Henry the Seventh said, "in our name and by our commandment," it is enough that by what he saw, John Cabot then created for a power that discredited the Bull of Demarcation a claim to a share in this Occidental-Orient, whatever it might prove to be.

These two revelations of an hour emerging from the night, one in the north and the other in the south, within five years of each other, were to determine that a people, predominantly English in spirit if not in blood, now holds the broad areas of this northern continent, while the lesser southern spaces have been yielded for the most part to a Latin race.

It is by no means certain that the initial contact developed for the northern discoverer any part of the main coast. We know that Columbus did not see it in the tropics. It depends upon the spot—and this is in dispute—where we place the landfall of Cabot in the north, whether we allow him then to have looked upon the mainland. There can be no question, however, with the cautious and circumspect historian, that the Genoese and the Venetian-Bristolese had the essential priority

in the discovery of the upper and lower regions of the North American Continent.

To dispute the precedence of Cabot, there has been advanced the claim of Vespucius to a voyage in 1497. It was discredited at the time, and is not proven now. Spain and England then, the foster-parents of this western world, owed their initial successes to the guiding minds of two expatriated Italians.

The interest which follows the voyage of Columbus is exceptionally increased by a narrative from his own hand—the only undoubted original account from any of the earliest explorers. It is unfortunate for the interest which the coming anniversary creates, that Cabot himself has left us not a syllable of his own. All that we know we get by hearsay, and even as hearsay it is scant and inadequate.

Nevertheless, what John Cabot, a seaman by reputation, a resident of England for six or seven years, and a man in the prime of life, did for England and for us, we can well understand, if we know but little of the way in which he did it.

There enters into our conception of the conditions of maritime discovery toward the west, at a time when the bruit of Columbus's success reached Bristol, vastly more of probability and possibility than of accredited fact. That the unknown paths of the great western sea had been adventurously

traversed for a century or more, in the north as well as in the south, admits of no question. Speculative enterprise had repeatedly sought (and Cabot himself is supposed to have shared in it) a supposed island lying seaward beyond Ireland. A belief in its existence has remained so ingrained in the English mind that only in our day has the British Admiralty ordered its obliteration from the charts. That the fishermen of the Bristol and English channels, in the search for fish to meet the fast-day diet of the Church, had pushed far beyond Iceland in the north, and beyond this supposed island in the west, is a matter of record. Whether they had discovered the shoals of cod for which the Banks of Newfoundland were to become famous is a question which we have abundant warrant in raising, and no explicit testimony to solve. That such voyages were made in the fifteenth century, and before the fame of Columbus marked the era, has long been supposed. That even Biscayan fishermen went there in these early days formerly seemed sufficiently so well established, that Spain in her diplomacy, more than once, claimed that by the acts of such fishermen she placed her right to these northeastern shores before that of the English. The historian hesitates to discard a probability so inherently fixed, as that hardy mariners of western Europe knew the Grand Banks in the middle of the fifteenth century, though no one can offer determinate evidence. It is certainly not

beyond a possibility that some chance development may at any time make it clear.

We may then readily conceive that it needed nothing but the report in England of the return of the Great Discoverer to Palos, to work in due time upon the imagination of a domiciled Italian mariner so as to arouse the enthusiasm of adventure. Zuan Cabotto, living in Bristol, had a spirit buoyed by the traditions of Venetian seamanship. He had travelled eastward as far as Mecca, and had gazed upon caravans returning from the Orient. In his birth he was a fellow-townsman of the now famous Genoese. He applied for and received from the English king a patent for a voyage westward. The date of this license, in March, 1496, as well as the letter of Raimondo (first disclosed thirty years ago), preclude the recognition of the year 1494 as that of the voyage, though it is found in contemporary documents, and has been adhered to in our time by even such scholars as Davezac. It is of much more importance to determine whether the mention of Sebastian Cabot's name in the license is ground for assuming that the son, now a man of nearly twenty-five, accompanied the father on the voyage, since it is from Sebastian's reputed talks with others that we derive such knowledge of the voyage as is additional to the slight reports gathered by his contemporaries from the commander, John Cabot, himself.

Unfortunately, there is a growing conviction that

Sebastian Cabot is not a man to be trusted. In large part it is because he was accustomed to tell different stories at different times, and to talk incoherently. We must never forget, however, that in these recitals we are dealing, not with what Sebastian Cabot said in studied, written phrase, but with what other people, not without prejudice, thought he said, and affirmed that he *did* say. The testimony often degenerates to a hearsay of a hearsay. While it is true that Sebastian's testimony stands in constant need of verification, it behooves a careful critic of his character to give the old pilot's reputation the benefit of some doubt.

If we believe Sebastian's own words as reported, he accompanied his father both on his first and second voyages. If we believe contemporary witnesses, and some are bitterly reproachful in their negatives, Sebastian was never on the coast of North America at all. The license of the voyage in 1497 shows that he and two other sons were joined with the father in a permission to make a voyage. This does not certainly prove that he or the other sons went. Indeed, in view of the conflicting testimony and eager habit of those who sought the royal countenance in such matters, a recent writer, Judge Prowse, of Newfoundland, has claimed that the insertion of the names of the three sons in the license was merely a legal subterfuge to keep alive the license to the end of the life of either; but it would seem that this was a provi-

sion hardly necessary, since the patent of itself, in express terms, extends the right of search to the heirs and deputies of the patentees.

More than a year elapsed after receiving the patent before John Cabot put to sea, in May, 1497, and he was back in Bristol, contrasting its full tides with the scant flow which he found in the New World, early in August, so that a period of about three months covers his eventful experience.

We have the names of the companions of Columbus in his first voyage, and among them we find that of a pilot, Juan de la Cosa. The earliest map which we have of American waters was made in 1500 by this man, and he is thought to have derived what knowledge he showed of the coast where Cabot had been, from the reports of the Bristol navigator. As not a chart of John Cabot has come down to us, this stretch of water "found by the English," as Cosa says of it, may stand for all that we have *in a chart* of Cabot's northern pioneer experiences. As Cosa's map is the earliest drawn delineation which we have of these new discoveries, so we have the earliest engraved representation in the edition of Ptolemy issued at Rome in 1508. That Ruysch, the maker of this other map, embodied in his draft of this northern shore the experience of Cabot more directly, is to be inferred from the accompanying text, where it is indicated that Ruysch was on the Matthew *with* Cabot, and if this was the case, Ruysch's name is

the only one known to us of less than a score of companions who shared with Cabot the elation of that summer morning when they first sighted land. It is also held from Ruysch's testimony that in leaving Cape Clear on the Irish coast, Cabot swept northerly in a course very like what we in our day call Great Circle sailing.

In the accounts of the voyage of Columbus we have courses and distances, and his track can be plotted reasonably well on a modern chart. So the registrations of his compass and the observations of his speed, gauged we must remember by the eye only, serve us in the attempt to fix his landfall. All such help is wanting when we endeavor to determine the scene of that eventful summer morning in 1497. Fifty years ago and more the discovery, in Germany, of what is now known as the Cabot mappemonde, preserved in the great Paris Library, revealed for the first time a definite spot for this landfall on the coast of Cape Breton. Unfortunately, the map, like almost everything associated with the name of Sebastian Cabot, is a bone of contention, and precisely what Sebastian Cabot's connection with it was, is still in doubt. It is a large engraved map of the world, bearing on the margins some printed historical and descriptive legends which purport to emanate from Sebastian himself. A copy of them in the handwriting of a certain Dr. Grajales has lately been found in Spain; but it is by no means certain

that this copy is more than a scribe's transcript, though it is possible that this Spanish savant may have written the legends at Sebastian's dictation. Citations of these inscriptions by contemporaries vary in places, and this indicates that a document now known in but a single copy, may in its day have been popular enough to have passed through several editions. At the sale of an old library in Silesia, a year or two ago, the same legends, set with the same type, were discovered in a brochure, which luckily found an American purchaser; and this may indicate a further popularity of these riddle-like inscriptions.

It has never been necessary to assume that the coast lines of the middle of the eighteenth century shown on this map, were taken from Cabot's plots made at the close of the preceding century, since the outlines were certainly taken directly from French maps, then recent, and much more detailed than Cabot's maps could have been.

Upon this borrowed configuration, at the island of Cape Breton, Sebastian had set the words *Tierra prima vista*, as marking the land first seen. This explicit testimony has been accepted by such writers as Deane and Markham, while others have found in the inconsistencies of the map and its legends some ground for believing that the landfall was placed at Cape Breton merely to pre-empt for England the gulf and valley of the St. Lawrence,

which Cartier and Roberval had been of late exploring in the interests of the French crown.

Before the discovery of this map, modern scholars had, almost without exception, placed Cabot's landfall on the Labrador coast. Their reasons for it depended upon Sebastian's reported evidence, and upon some other intimations that John Cabot himself may have approved. Here, in this more northern region, somewhere between the straits of Belle Isle and Cape Chudleigh, at the entrance of Hudson's Bay, some scholars, *in spite of the map*, still place the Cabot landfall. The facts, however, that the map was well known to Ortelius and others, professed geographers, who offered no objection to the legends, and that the Cape Breton contact was accepted by Michael Lok, in the map which he made for Hakluyt, go a good way toward enforcing confidence in the testimony of the map. There is a third belief that John Cabot first struck the easterly coast of Newfoundland, and this view is naturally embraced by the writers upon that earliest English colony. The fact is that, without further light, the testimony on this point is so conflicting that there can never be a general concurrence of opinion.

Wherever the landfall may have been, John Cabot saw no inhabitants; but he observed traces of human occupation in needles of bone and in fish-nets. Since the next visitor to these waters, Cortereal, found silver disks and a battered European

John Cabot, and authorizing him to make this second voyage, in 1498, supposed the act of possession meant anything more than securing, as against other Europeans, the right to trade with the denizens of Cathay.

It is apparent from the map of Ruysch that there had been as yet no suspicion that Greenland was otherwise than a part of northwestern Europe, neighboring to Asia, as it had long been considered. All the north was still a mystery, for the land and its inhabitants bore little resemblance to what the accounts of Marco Polo had led them to expect.

The serious question which lay in the minds of cosmographers was this: How are Calicut and the Ganges, which in the past had been reached from Europe by going east, related to this great barrier which had been encountered in approaching India by going west?

The Portuguese, schooled upon a forbidding sea, in their search westward for islands, real to them and fabled to us, had later opened the African route to India.

Two and three years after the second Cabot voyage, these same Portuguese, finding Greenland and now judging it to be a point of Asia, and undetermined whether the land west and southwest of Greenland was an island or the main, appeared under Cortereal in the very region which Cabot had pre-empted for the English crown three and four years before.

Coincidently, Cabral, bound with a supply fleet from Lisbon for India, was borne westward to the Brazilian coast. Thus meeting land unexpectedly, and supposing himself not to have exceeded the three hundred and seventy leagues west of the Azores, which had been finally fixed upon for the line of demarcation, he sent a vessel back to the Tagus to report that the coast, which he had found, must be on the Portuguese side of the line of demarcation. This northeast shoulder of South America, protruding so far seaward, was a development that the mind of pope or king had never yet dreamed of as complicating the Spanish claim to the entire New World.

There was at once an evident corollary. If Cabral had thus secured a segment of eastern South America for the House of Braganza, why may not Cortereal, now on his way north, ascertain if the land there discovered for the English may not likewise stretch far enough east to give the Portuguese crown an equal claim to it, and thus allow a political rival to flank on either hand the Spanish possessions in the region of the Antilles? When Cortereal estimated, or pretended to estimate, this northeastern coast of North America, he found it, as the early Portuguese drafts of the line of demarcation show, within the three hundred and seventy leagues west of the Azores, and, accordingly, a Portuguese possession under the Pope's decision. We find in Cape Race to-day the *Capo raso* of Cor-

Pert, in 1516, those of the Great Livery Companies under Henry VIII., in 1521, and of Rut, in 1527.

While thus the territorial claims of England, extending from Hudson's Bay to Florida, were remaining practically dormant, Fagundez, in 1521, was placing the Portuguese flag in Nova Scotia; Gomez and Ayllon, in 1521–25, were tracking for Spain the shores from the Bahama channel to the Gulf of Maine. In 1524 Sebastian Cabot, while presiding at the Congress of Badajos, had not demurred at the claim of the King of Spain to this same coast. In the same interval Verrazano had set upon French maps the name of New France athwart the broad areas of the continent; and Cartier and Roberval, for Francis I., had delved into the land by the waters which proved to be the outflow of the Great Lakes.

In the year in which Cartier was ascending the St. Lawrence, when that exploit became known, it alarmed the English, because it jeopardized their claim to that region. There was at that time a suit in Spain, in which the Crown sought to abridge the legacy of Columbus to his heirs. In this cause Sebastian Cabot, now transferred to the service of Spain, testified that he did not know that Florida was connected by a continuous coast with the region which he claimed to have visited with his father in 1497 and 1498. This awkward contradiction is but a specimen of the perverse falsities that

are found in Sebastian Cabot's reported sayings. His negative testimony was not accepted and was flatly denied by others, as the contemporary maps disclose.

It has been suggested that the apathy of the English Government at this time in not pushing the other western powers by like activity on her part, was owing in some part, at least, to the unwillingness of Cardinal Wolsey. This prelate was too ambitious of a seat on the papal throne to risk success by thwarting any projects of the emperor for supremacy throughout the western world.

It has also been suggested, as has been already remarked, that it was to offset the claims of France from the Cartier voyage that Sebastian Cabot falsified the record of his father's landfall by placing it at Cape Breton. His purpose was, it is claimed, to extend the English right to the water-shed of the St. Lawrence by marking in this way the entrance of the Gulf. By the time (1544) he made this pretension a part of his great map, he had certainly discovered that an unbroken coast extended from Labrador to Florida. If one may believe that this assignment of a landfall at Cape Breton was indeed an act of prevarication, there is nothing as yet to show that the legend of *prima vista* had any official sanction in England.

The belief that America was an independent continent, which had very early in the sixteenth

where recognized. They had little community of habit, were diversified by climate and foreign amalgamations, and they had a scant union of commercial interests. But there was one commanding agency which recent advocates of Dutch influence seem to have forgotten. The English common law bound together their social life, and gave them essential homeogeneousness of temperament, which no alien infusion could overcome. They were planted upon the soil and nourished upon the sea in a way that gave them a country and not a sojourning place, as Champlain was grieved to find the French were making of the north. Farmstead and mill and fishing wear contrasted with the fur-laden canoe and the mission-hut of the French. Families between the Appalachians and the sea grew to the soil, and acres were heirlooms. On the St. Lawrence the bedizened savage was a brother of the trapper; the dusky daughter of the Huron was the burden-bearer of his camp. On the sea the New Englander established his birthright. On the water-courses of the north the Norman trader and the Jesuit thridded the wilderness. Thus it happened that while the stanch barkentines of the English colonists were known on the Spanish Main and in the Mediterranean, exhibiting a race of rugged seamen, the birch-canoe of Montreal was poled against the rifts of the Ottawa, and broke the reflection of the pictured rocks of Lake Superior till French grimace encountered not unsuccess-

fully the Indian sign language in the innermost depths of the wilderness. Whether in the woods or upon the ocean, there was no hazard too great for either. The French found the portages which conducted them to the Mississippi. Two hundred years after the Matthew lay to with backed sails against the verdured shore of the New World, the Gallican priest and explorer were coursing the great central valley of the continent, and crossed with a rival claim the imagined extension of the English charters. All the while the Atlantic colonists were kept back by the Appalachians, and knew nothing of what lay beyond.

The eighteenth century opened and presented the spectacle of the English just beginning to realize, after a century of colonization, the possibilities of the West. It had taken five-score years for the true significance of the Cabot discovery to dawn upon the English mind. It had required another century for that colonization to experience the throes of expansion.

In the early years of the eighteenth century the traders of Carolina had pushed along the trails of the Cherokees and Chickasaws. In Virginia, Spotswood and the famous knights of the Golden Horseshoe had glimpsed, as was supposed, the great inland waters which the French possessed. The New Englanders were pushing aggressively into Acadia to atone for the fatal incapacity of Phips at Quebec.

only made good the seaboard charters in their extension to the Mississippi, but had rescued the valley of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes from French control, and had brought into one dominion the vast areas of the eastern half of the continent from Hudson Bay on the north to Spanish Florida on the south.

With the meteor-flag had spread the masterful speech of England. Thus it was that a Hudson Bay factor, at the trading stations on Nelson River, received his orders in the commercial phrase of Fenchurch Street in London. Thus it was that the Knickerbockers of New York, the Scotch-Irish of Pennsylvania and of the valley of Virginia, who were also pushing upon the Holston and the Cumberland; the Swiss and Huguenot of the Carolinas, and the Sälzburger of Georgia were being indoctrinated with English law, couched in the language of Shakespeare and Bunyan. Over them all streamed the same flag, which had fluttered in the shore breezes upon the little Matthew in 1497, and had flaunted in defiance when Drake and other west countrymen hung upon the flanks of the Spanish Armada.

From the Treaty of Paris, in 1763, to that which recognized the independence of the American Republic, twenty years later, social and political conditions worked great revolutions along the western march.

A change of allegiance drove some of the best blood of the seaboard across the great water-way which Cartier and Champlain opened, and along which the trade of Duluth and Fort William is now seeking a deep channel to the Atlantic. The rigors of the war for independence reared twin and manly races, that at its close and since have carried the same blood westward by parallel ways on each side of the boundary of the United States and Canada. Time must show if these divided currents are bound again to form one and the same political brotherhood, under a common flag.

The present century came in and the name and fame of Cabot had almost passed from the memory of American and Canadian, who owe him so much, when the ascendancy of that passion for territorial development, which has always been a strain in the English blood, wherever it flowed, spread its domination to the Gulf of Mexico in treaty-conquests from Spain, and stretched its sway to the Rockies, in the acquisition of Louisiana from the French. Later still, the war with Mexico opened to Anglo-American influences a long stretch of the Pacific coast.

With the transfer of Alaska from Russia the influence of the same policy has been extended along the sea which Balboa first sighted, from Bering's Strait to Santa Barbara, until at last there is not a State north of Mexico which now prints its

sessional laws in any other language than English; and not a political community that cannot join in remembering the event which next year we commemorate.

On the completion of four hundred years from that summer's dawn, when the sun dispelled the damp and lay the warmth of its beams all the way from icy Labrador to coralled Florida, with not a Christian soul to greet it, we may well pause to scan the portentous annals which have followed.

Since the Matthew hove to, and John Cabot threw the lead and first felt the rebound from American land as it trembled along the slackening line, a like thrill has been repeated in every new sounding of the depths of English power throughout this broad continent, from that day to this, through four centuries of renown!

STATE.

OF CONGRESS
0 014 014 741 2